



# Genealogy

## Clan Strachan Society

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## Genealogy Claims and Family Traditions

by Garry Strachan, Member AGRA (December 2007)

For centuries, various families (Strachans and non-Strachans alike) have made lineage claims to royalty or nobility. My own experience over the years confirms this.

I honestly believe there is no malice in their claims, and believe that the individuals making lineage claims to royalty or nobility are doing so in good conscious. After all, there is no reason not to believe their undocumented family traditions... **or is there?**

Quite simply, it is far more romantic a notion that one's family comes from royalty or nobility, rather than the far more probable... that being poor tenant farmers trying to raise a family in medieval times whilst living in a mud and straw hut. This was, in fact, the plight of the far majority of Scots during this period in history.

It is perhaps for this very reason that many of these family traditions have started. The maligned science of genealogy did not exist up until just recently; and birth, marriage, or death certificates are a relatively recent innovation. In fact, birth, marriage & death certificates only started being recorded in

the early 1800s in England. Subsequently, virtually all lineages prior to 1800 in Scotland became lost, and it became far more romantic to associate your family to one of Scotland's royalty or nobility.

We often find lineage claims to royalty or nobility based on family oral tradition, which cannot be substantiated through primary documentation. From a genealogical perspective, and based on my own experience in performing genealogical research on various families, one must be extremely careful when assuming family tradition as fact. More often than not, these oral traditions are incorrect, or have been skewed over time.

The Arms of Dr. Alexander Glas Strachan is a perfect example, I believe, of one assuming oral tradition as fact.

In this case, Dr. Strachan made claims when applying for his "American Arms" that he was descendant from the Strachans of Thornton.

Although we have no idea of the validity of the genealogical statements, it is true some immigrants assumed arms and made claim

to lineages that went undocumented because of the time period.



In the case of Dr. Alexander Glas Strachan, he did not obtain his Arms from the Court of the Lord Lyon, but from a herald located in the United States (*Virginia Heraldica Being A Resistry of Virginia Gentry Entitled to Coat Armor with Genealogical Notes of the Families*).

This information was taken from a book, in which it states the claim was originally made in 1912. However, neither Dr. Strachan nor any of his descendants have made an ancillary claim to the Court of the Lord Lyon towards chiefship, nor has there been any claim on the Baronetcy that the Strachans of

Thornton possessed. Subsequently, we believe his claim, "... *to descended from the ancient house of Strachan of Thornton*," to be based on unsubstantiated family tradition.

There is one instance of the Minor family of Connecticut, which had a bogus parchment created in the 1680s that went unchallenged until about 1977, when the family association was placing a plaque in a parish church in England. The minister decided to check with the Herald's College and it was discovered that the family never was granted arms, and that the Herald's parchment had a fake herald's name on it.

There are other examples.

The family of Wise of Hillbank had a book written, the Memorials of the Strachans, 1st Edition. This book has all the appearances of being a genuine source for accurate information regarding the Strachans of Thornton. It was authored by Charles Rogers, FSA Scot. However, after being researched by Maj. Benjamin Strachan (author: **A History of the Strachans**), Jim Strachan (author: **Here's Tae us, Wha's Like Us! A History of Clan Strachan**), and several other people... the book has been deemed a "special pleading" that is riddled with errors and inaccurate sources.

Finally, Patrick Henebel in France has documents dating back to 1669. These documents were from Charles II to one Alexander Strachan living in France. The correspondence pertains, "*To the establishment of the nobility/purity of his ascent through his family tree.*" As Jim Strachan suggests, these letters have several inaccuracies, and again, have all the signs of being a special pleading.

Unlike today, in centuries past it was quite a popular practice to make lineage claims to royalty or nobility. After all, it was virtually impossible to prove the claims either way.

The fact is that many families made similar genealogical claims to royalty and nobility in centuries past. These claims were probably made in good faith, with the individual simply making assumptions about their family's heritage based on what they had been told as a youth. Subsequently, we understand the problem with individuals

claiming connections to nobility and/or royalty.

Based on this information, I highly recommend that any lineage claim to nobility or royalty be substantiated through primary genealogical documentation. After all, there are far more inaccuracies regarding these types of claims, then there are truths.